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### OJIBWA FEATHER SYMBOLISM

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Among the most trustworthy sources of information relating to the Ojibwa Indians are the writings of Kahkewaquonaby, better known as Reverend Peter Jones ; these writings comprise some twenty-five titles noted in Pilling's Bibliography of the Algonquian Languages. According to his autobiography,<sup>1</sup> Kahkewaquonaby was born "at the Heights of Burlington bay, Canada West," January 1, 1802.<sup>2</sup> He died June 29, 1856. His grandfather migrated from Wales to New York prior to the Revolution ; his father, Augustus Jones, studied land surveying in New York city, and during later life was employed as King's Deputy Provincial Surveyor in Upper Canada. His duties brought him in contact with the Algonquian tribes ; and he learned their language and married, by native rites, Tuhbenahneequay, daughter of Wahbanosay, a chief of the Mississauga group of the Ojibwa tribe. Constantly engaged in surveys and attendant journeys, Surveyor Jones left his family with the tribe ; and the mother long remained a pagan, while the children were taught to gain the approbation of the manitos and thereby to become successful hunters. In his youth Kahkewaquonaby blackened his face with charcoal and fasted "in order to obtain the aid of personal gods or familiar spirits," and attended the native feasts and dances ; for more than fourteen years he "lived and wandered about with the Indians in the woods." In early childhood he was christened in accordance with the tribal custom, which he describes as follows :

When I was young a grand feast was made for the purpose of giving me an Indian name, and of dedicating me to the guardian care of some particular god, according to the Indian fashion. I was then named Kahkewaquonaby, which literally means "sacred waving feathers," and re-

<sup>1</sup> Life | and | Journals | of | Kah-ke-wa-quo-nā-by : | (Rev. Peter Jones,) | Wesleyan Missionary. | Published under the direction of the Missionary | Committee, Canada Conference. | — | Toronto : | Published by Anson Green, | at the Wesleyan Printing Establishment, | King street east. | 1860.

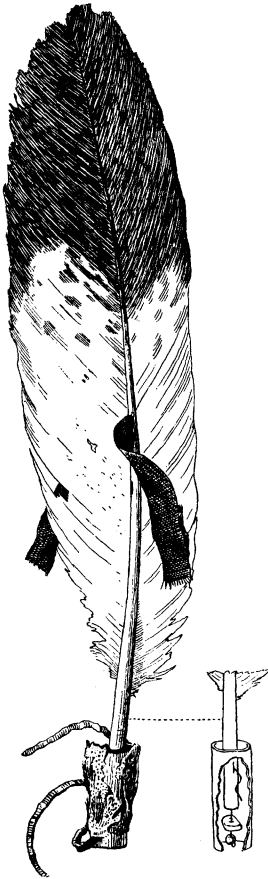
This work is exceedingly rare ; it was not seen by Pilling, whose title contains two or three trifling typographic errors.

<sup>2</sup> Not "in the year 1831," as stated in a rather absurd posthumous biography prefixed to his "History of the Ojebway Indians," London, 1861 (page 5).

fers to feathers plucked from the eagle, the sacred bird. By this name I was dedicated to the thunder god; the eagle being considered by the Indians the representative of the god of thunder. At this feast I was presented with a war club and a bunch of eagle's feathers, which I was to

keep as a memorial of my dedication, the club denoting the power, and the feathers the flight of the god of thunder. \* \* \*

My grandfather, Chief Wahbanosay, officiated at this feast, and gave me my name, which belongs to the Eagle Totem, clan or tribe, it being that to which my mother belonged.



Kahkewaquonaby had the misfortune to lose his plume for a time, as indicated in his autobiography; but it was subsequently recovered and passed into the custody of his seventh son, Kahkewaquonaby (Junior), or Peter Edmund Jones, M.D., of Hagersville, Ontario,<sup>1</sup> who inherited also the paternal suit of buckskin ornamented with porcupine quills and decorated with the eagle totem, as well as the war club and other paraphernalia. Dr Jones has preserved these articles as sacred heirlooms and priceless records of the past; and on coming to Washington recently he carried them with him, and has been photographed in the full regalia of his clan and tribe as handed down by his distinguished sire.

The titular plume and the feather head-dress are significant as representing a symbolism akin to that of various other aboriginal tribes, including the Ponka.<sup>2</sup> The feathers have suffered somewhat from handling and from the attacks of moths, but are otherwise in excellent condition, the plume being preserved in a carved wooden case made for the purpose.

<sup>1</sup> Not Peter Edward, as indicated in the Pilling Bibliography, page 272.

<sup>2</sup> *American Anthropologist*, vol. XI, 1898, page 156.

The plume proper consists of a single upright feather with its attachment, as shown in the accompanying figure (one third natural size). Save that the tablet is lacking, the device for attachment coincides in design with that of the Ponka Indians. In this case the barrel is made from the femur of the eagle, and the bone is covered with a sheath of eagle-skin formerly bearing soft down—the symbol of the mystery or “spirit”—which has now largely disappeared, together with portions of the skin itself. The false bottom is of metal, with two perforations (though the second is functionless), while the axis is a bit of wire headed by a hollow metallic bead, which is passed through a wooden plug in the shaft of the feather and clinched by a bending down outside. The perforations of the barrel and the thong for attachment to the tablet correspond precisely to those of the Ponka device; but, so far as can be gathered from the present owner, the tablet was not of bone, but of stone—one of several in his possession. Thus the device is apparently more primitive than that of the Ponka (1) in the sheath of down-covered eagle-skin enclosing the barrel, and (2) in the stone tablet, while the metallic false bottom and axis are accultural (though there is reasonable ground for considering them subsequent to the original plume and introduced in making repairs).

The meaning of the symbolic feature is clearly indicated in the elder Kahkewaquonaby's felicitous and remarkably comprehensive account of the christening, which shows that the plume was at the same time name symbol, individual totem, and fetish—at once the sign and source of superphysical potency.

The plume proper was supplemented by seven hawk feathers attached to buckskin thongs, by which they were tied to tresses and worn pendent; no definite symbolic meaning is conveyed by them to their present possessor.

The head-dress worn occasionally by Kahkewaquonaby and bequeathed to his son was originally the property of a chief who sacrificed it on his conversion to christianity; and thereafter it was to Kahkewaquonaby a trophy of spiritual strife and of conquest over the dark powers of paganism. The original owner is not now known. It consists of an elaborately beaded fillet supporting a crown of feathers of eagle and hawk, set upright. The principal symbolic feature is a “Mystery” wand, consisting of a wooden skewer wrapped with porcupine quills

and supporting a fluffy tuft of eagle down rising to the full height of the feather crown. The head-dress itself is the symbol of leadership or chieftaincy. With the addition of the Mystery symbol, it becomes the symbol of a shaman—*i. e.*, a leader of mysteries and men, or a magician-warrior. From the rear of the fillet a strand of the long, coarse, tawny hair from the neck of the moose, interbraided with buckskin thongs, depends below the waist; it is the symbolic scalp-lock, the individual warrior-standard and badge of courage. Several feathers are attached to the strand. One of these is a wing feather of hawk or kite, with shaft passing through a carved dew-claw of the deer in such manner as to rattle softly when shaken. This appears to be the symbol of swift flight, and hence a perpetual invocation to the potencies controlling escape from peril of ambush or covert attack.

Especial interest attaches to the plume as a symbol of known meaning and unbroken history, used in a particular ceremony nearly a century ago; at the same time it carries the general interest of that primitive symbolism which prepared the way for graphic language, and which met the mnemonic needs of pre-scriptorial culture much as books serve to supplement memory in scriptorial culture.

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ETHNOGRAPHICAL SURVEY OF THE UNITED KINGDOM.—This Survey, which is conducted by a committee of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, has issued a circular in which it expresses a desire to obtain the services of qualified observers in numerous parts of the United Kingdom, for the purpose of inquiring into (1) Physical types of the inhabitants; (2) Current traditions and beliefs; (3) Peculiarities of dialect; (4) Monuments and other remains of ancient culture, and (5) Historical evidence as to continuity of race. The committee has drawn up a code of instructions for observers, with explanatory notes, and will be prepared, if necessary, to supply the instruments required for measurement, and to defray the incidental out-of-pocket expenses incurred by an observer. Mr E. Sidney Hartland is the honorary secretary of the committee.